



The City of Seattle

## Landmarks Preservation Board

700 Third Avenue • 4th floor • Seattle, Washington 98104 • (206) 684-0228

### REPORT ON DESIGNATION

LPB 219/02

Name and Address of Property: **Hat 'n' Boots**  
**6919 E. Marginal Way S.**

Legal Description: Collins #46, Block 2, Lot 109

At the public meeting held on July 3, 2002, the City of Seattle's Landmarks Preservation Board voted to approve designation of the Hat 'n' Boots at 6919 E. Marginal Way S. as a Seattle Landmark based upon satisfaction of the following standards for designation of SMC 25. 12.350:

- (D.) *It embodies the distinctive visible characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or of a method of construction.*
- (F.) *Because of its prominence of spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of its neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or city.*

### DESCRIPTION

Sited on the northwest corner of East Marginal Way South and Corson Avenue South in the Georgetown neighborhood of Seattle, the former Hat 'n' Boots gas station at 6910 East Marginal Way South consists of one hat and a pair of boots. Both the hat and boots are in the style associated with the Western cowboy. Characteristic of this style is the wide brim of the hat with the upturned sides and the decorative stitched patterns on the boots. Hat 'n' Boots has been vacant since 1988. The area surrounding the Hat 'n' Boots site is a mix of vacant land and industrial uses. To the north of the Hat 'n' Boots site is the Department of Transportation Maintenance Facility (6401 Corson Avenue South). To the south across East Marginal Way South are warehouses. The Vintage Telephone Equipment Museum (7000 East Marginal Way South) is located to the east. The land to the west is largely vacant and extends to the South Seattle Community College/Duwamish Education and Apprenticeship Training Center (6770 East Marginal Way South).

Built on a concrete foundation, the approximately 300 s.f. one-story hat served as the office for the gas station. The steel frame upon which the hat sits is octagonal in plan with each side measuring 6

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Department of Neighborhoods**

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feet in length. The office space is 20 feet in diameter and 9 feet in height. The structure is about 19 feet from the base of the office to the top of the hat. The window bays (six of the eight sides) no longer have their fixed plate glass. The glass has either been removed or broken over the years. Some of the window bays retain the original column braces. One window bay on the west elevation is covered with painted plywood on the exterior and particleboard on the interior.

The two slightly recessed entrances are located opposite one another on the east and west elevations. Each consists of a single aluminum-frame door with a horizontal push bar adjacent to a fixed, vertically oriented, aluminum window frame. Neither the door nor the window has the glass intact. Above the east door is a sliding aluminum window with a screen. A transom window sits atop the west door.

A floor-to-ceiling CMU (concrete masonry unit) wall stands as an island in the back of the office interior and serves as a backdrop for the installation of electrical boxes, conduits, and telephone wires. The floor is unpainted concrete and is in good condition. The plaster ceiling is in poor condition with peeling paint. An opening in the ceiling reveals the steel frame structure of the hat above. Five recessed lights are located along the perimeter of the ceiling and one fluorescent tube lighting fixture spans across the ceiling.

The hat itself is constructed of steel frame with wire mesh and clad in Gunite, a concrete mixture that is sprayed from a special gun over steel reinforcements. Gunite is also known as sprayed concrete or shotcrete. In 1907, the Cement Gun Company of Allentown, Pennsylvania was the first United States company to use sprayed concrete. The device made for spraying the concrete was invented by Carl Ethan Akeley, owner of the Cement-Gun Company. His company trademarked the brand name "Gunite." The word is still used today as a generic term for sprayed concrete. Mr. Akeley invented the spray gun to apply concrete onto mesh to build dinosaurs. (MBT Underground Construction). This same method of casting concrete was used for finishing Hat 'n' Boots.

The crown of the hat is 10 feet tall and 20 feet in diameter. The brim of the hat at its widest point is 44 feet in diameter. The exterior of the hat and office are painted red. The condition of the hat is poor, with portions of the Gunite cladding missing or loose. However, the integrity of the form remains. The interior office space is exposed to the elements because of broken or missing windows and doors.

The pair of cowboy boots is located about 22 feet northeast of the hat and houses the restrooms. Constructed of steel studs with paper-backed steel tex clad in Gunite, the shorter boot (women's restroom) is about 21.5 feet high and the taller boot (men's restroom) is about 24 feet high. Each boot measures 20 feet from the toe to heel and the combined width is 10 feet. The boots are joined at the sides. Each restroom is accessed through a recessed entrance located on the exposed sides. Each restroom contains one toilet and one sink. The heel and sole of each boot are constructed of poured concrete. Both boots are painted white with red and blue accents that have faded significantly. Some of the stitched patterns are still visible. Creases on the boots (an original feature) make them appear worn. The sole and heel of the boots are painted dark brown.

Landscape features around the boots include two trees at the back of the boots and some overgrown bushes. The rest of the site is paved in asphalt with grass and weeds growing from the cracks.



## Original Appearance

Originally, the Hat 'n' Boots had the following characteristics and features: The color of the hat was vermilion (bright red-orange.) A band of copper trim wrapped around the base of the crown of the hat. A yellow sign with black outlines reading, "Premium Tex," stood on the brim of the hat on the east elevation as a separate projecting element. The Gunite was sprayed onto the hat and hand-troweled onto the boots.

The men's boot was dark blue with white, sky blue, and brown accents. The women's boot was white with light blue accents. The sole and heel of the boots were painted dark brown.

Surrounding the pair of boots was a ranch-style wood fence with horizontal rails inserted into the posts which were set into the ground. Taller vertical posts with the signs, "Cowboys" and "Cowgirls," were located near the entrance to the respective restrooms.

The original site had nine pump islands fed by two underground 10,000-gallon fuel tanks. A series of rubber tires standing on end were situated in front of the hat and near the boots and served a decorative and practical function as a fence.

## Alterations

None of the pump islands, tires, or wooden fence remains on the site. The hat and boots have been repainted several times. A chain-link fence surrounds the hat. Portions of the Gunite cladding on the hat were removed during a lead-based paint and asbestos abatement process performed in June 2001. Aside from the condition of the Gunite cladding of the hat, the form of the hat and the steel framing are intact and the boots retain a high degree of structural and aesthetic integrity. The structures were continuously used as a gas station and restrooms until the station was closed in 1988.

## SIGNIFICANCE

As a nationally recognized roadside icon, the Hat 'n' Boots gas station has been considered a local "landmark" since it was erected in 1954. It is the last surviving structure of its kind in Seattle. Hat 'n' Boots holds considerable sentimental and associative value within the Georgetown community and the residents of the city. By virtue of its character, design, and scale, it is an easily identifiable visual feature of the neighborhood and city (Criterion F). It is also significant as an excellent example of vernacular roadside architecture in the United States (Criterion D). Hat 'n' Boots represents one of the last structures of programmatic architecture constructed during the heyday of road travel in America.

## Hat 'n' Boots

The Hat 'n' Boots gas station was to be part of a planned Western-themed development known as Buford Seals Frontier Village Shopping complex. It was the cornerstone of the complex and its purpose was to grab people's attention and bring them into the complex. The gas station itself also served the many travelers along what was then US 99. The \$2 million shopping complex was to

include 185 independent businesses in addition to the gas station and a supermarket known as Foodville (6651 Corson Avenue South). Only Hat 'n' Boots, a warehouse, a display room, and Foodville were constructed on the 11-acre industrial site owned by King County. The land was leased to Mr. Seals's company, the Corson Corporation. The rest of the project was abandoned when the developer, Buford Seals, could not finance the construction of the shopping complex. The giant cowboy hat and the pair of boots were the designer Lewis Nasmyth's (commercial artist) idea. He sketched both out on a napkin and presented it to Mr. Seals. Seals loved the idea immediately. Nasmyth came up with the design and architect Albert Poe executed the drawings for permitting purposes. Bruce Olsen served as the structural engineer and Bennett Campbell, Inc. provided contracting services.

Buford Seals was known in Seattle as one of the owners of the Three GIs, a chain of war surplus stores that Mr. Seals, George LaMaine, and Don Wallace opened in 1946. In 1948, Mr. Seals sold his share of the profits to his two partners. When his Frontier Village did not come to fruition, he moved to Portland, Oregon to pursue other business ventures. He eventually made his way to San Diego, California where he opened Buford's Place, a convenience store and candy shop (Seattle P-I, 1983).

Foodville closed after only a few years. The building is no longer extant. Hat 'n' Boots went on to become Washington State's highest selling gas station (History Ink, 2001). The 588 s.f., one-story warehouse that was located north of the hat most likely served as a storage place for the gifts that were given to customers. The 931 s.f. display room, identified as "Premiums," was a separate one-story, steel frame and glass building that once stood north of the boots. It displayed the gifts, such as toasters and drinking glasses, that people could claim after filling up their cars (Seattle P-I, 2000). Hat 'n' Boots was named "Premium Tex" for these gifts that were given out.

#### Neighborhood Context: Georgetown

Hat 'n' Boots is located in the Georgetown neighborhood of Seattle. Georgetown was annexed to Seattle in 1910. The years between 1916 and 1942 were marked by increased industrialization of the area. "The completion of the Duwamish Waterway in 1917 created additional cheap factory sites with shipping facilities close at hand. The establishment of businesses such as Boeing signaled a new direction for the area as well the beginning of the end of the reliance on rail travel." (Krafft and Wickwire, 1997)

The ascendancy of industrialization between 1942 and 1965 "saw the beginning of trends of decline for the residential portions of Georgetown as phenomenal growth on the industrial side continued unabated in the greater Duwamish Valley. Fueled by the war effort, businesses, such as Boeing, brought thousands more workers to the area. As the neighborhood families aged, their children moved away, and few new families found the increasingly industrial area a desirable place to raise children." (Krafft and Wickwire, 1997)

The increased industrialization of the neighborhood meant that a large daytime population was coming into the area. Hat 'n' Boots, with its location on US 99, a road much traveled by those who came to work in the neighborhood and by those who were passing through, was poised to take advantage of the increasing vehicular traffic volume. A gas station conveniently located would



serve this population of commuters. Hat 'n' Boots remained in operation until it closed in 1988 and has been vacant since.

The Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) owns the entire 11-acre property and has plans to sell the land in its entirety. The State acquired the parcel from King County in a 1985 land-for-parks exchange. The County had owned the land for decades and leased out the land to the original owner and builder of Hat 'n' Boots (Buford Seals). All subsequent owners of the gas station either leased the property from the County or the State. Hat 'n' Boots sits on a small portion of the parcel (less than one acre.) The State agreed to sell Hat 'n' Boots for a nominal price of \$1 to any group or individual that will move the structures to another site.

## Hwy 99

By the time Hat 'n' Boots was built in 1954, the American love affair with automobiles and the road was in full swing and the first era of auto travel was coming to a close. "America emerged from World War II with a pent-up demand for nearly every consumer product, including automobiles and gasoline. The number of registered motor vehicles had dropped by some 4 million down to 30 million during the war. But by 1955 registrations had redoubled. Between 1945 and 1957, the demand for all petroleum products soared some 80 percent." (Jakle, 1994) Highway development in America mirrored the growth in automobile production and increased demand in gasoline. "Between 1945 and 1955, federal aid highway mileage jumped some 440,000 miles..." (Jakle, 1994)

The federal government built the Pacific Highway in 1915, which stretched from Blaine, Washington to the north, to Calexico, California to the south. It traversed most of the major cities, including Seattle, along the West Coast and served as the major north-south route in California, Oregon, and Washington. In 1926, the US Highway System was founded and started assigning route numbers to named highways. Other familiar named routes in the country include the Lincoln Highway and the Dixie Highway. Pacific Highway became US 99. It was decommissioned in 1971 and became State Route 99 (SR 99). Hat 'n' Boots was constructed along the East Marginal Way South portion of US 99.

The early years of Hat 'n' Boots were the most successful in terms of gasoline sales in Washington. Construction of Interstate 5 in 1962 significantly affected the traffic volume on US 99. With less vehicular traffic on US 99, business at Hat 'n' Boots decreased. From the late 1950s through 1960s, the interstate highways replaced the old highways as the faster means of transportation. Establishments related to gas, food and lodging cropped up along the interstate highways at off-ramps. After a succession of different owners, Hat 'n' Boots closed in 1988.

## Roadside Architecture

Whether in its heyday, at its closing, or in the present, Hat 'n' Boots has always been considered a "landmark." Hat 'n' Boots is an excellent example of vernacular roadside architecture and is recognized nationally as an icon. Its 1954 construction date makes it one of the later buildings of this type.

There is not one term that describes these buildings in the shape of giant teepees, milk bottles,

teapots/coffeepots, hot dogs, pigs, etc. Known variously as programmatic architecture, mimetic architecture, the “duck,” or oddball architecture, the recognition of the significance of this type of architecture is increasing. David Gebhard first coined the term “programmatic architecture” to describe this type of architecture in the introduction to Jim Heimann and Rip Georges’s book, *California Crazy, Roadside Vernacular Architecture* (1981). Mimetic architecture refers to that which is imitative. The “duck” was used by Robert Venturi, Denise Scott Brown and Steven Izenour in their book, *Learning from Las Vegas*, in which they stated, “Where the architectural systems of space, structure and program are submerged and distorted by an overall symbolic form. This kind of building-becoming-sculpture we call the duck in honor of the duck-shape drive-in, ‘The Long Island Duckling’” (Venturi, Scott Brown, Izenour, 1993).

The largest concentration of programmatic architecture was found in California, particularly the Los Angeles area. However, these “architectural aberrations were joined by thousands more along the roadsides, in cities, over hinterlands, and across the breadth of America. You can attribute this building boom to the automobile....The proliferation of twentieth century buildings that were constructed to look like apples, pigs, kettles, grasshoppers, and the like were a direct product of this emerging car culture, which accelerated in the late teens and early twenties.” (Heimann, 2001) The golden years of programmatic architecture occurred in the 1920s and 1930s.

Hat ‘n’ Boots is often mentioned or profiled in literature on roadside architecture. In *California Crazy and Beyond, Roadside Vernacular Architecture*, Jim Heimann describes Hat ‘n’ Boots as an outstanding example of programmatic architecture. Hat ‘n’ Boots also appears in the book, *Pump and Circumstance, Glory Days of the Gas Station* by John Margolies. It was named one of America’s greatest roadside attractions by the Ford Motor Co. in its publication, *Fair Lanes*. It was included in a National Building Museum exhibit titled “See the USA: Automobile Travel and the American Landscape.”

The purpose of Hat ‘n’ Boots and its genre of architecture, is to grab the attention of passersby and convince them to stop and buy the product(s). This was not an easy task when the potential customer was driving along a highway or roadway at 35 mph or more. The building effectively became the sign to draw in people. Chester Liebs in *Main Street to Miracle Mile* called it the “lure of the bizarre.” It was “architecture for speed-reading.” He writes, “Customarily the shapes of these unusual structures physically illustrated the name or nature of the business or the merchandise sold inside.” (Liebs, 1985) Hat ‘n’ Boots is an example of a structure that physically illustrated its name yet had no correlation with the products sold or services rendered.

Hat ‘n’ Boots is one of a handful of programmatic structures left in Washington. The teapot gas station in Zillah (1922) is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and Washington Heritage Register. Constructed to resemble a teapot by the gas station owner and builder, it is a reminder of the Teapot Dome oil lease scandals of the Harding Administration. In 1978, the station was moved 1.2 miles west of its original location on SR 12 (Old Highway 12) during the construction of Interstate 82. It still functions as its original use.

Bob’s Java Jive in Tacoma (2102 S. Tacoma Way) is a restaurant/bar housed in a structure shaped like a coffeepot on Old Highway 99. The Benewah Creamery Buildings (Milk Bottles) in Spokane are still extant and date from the 1930s. The Milk Bottle is located at 820 West Garland and houses



a popular ice cream shop and diner. The other milk bottle is located at 320 South Cedar (Digital TV and Wireless.)

The Igloo Restaurant in Seattle stood off US 99 at the southeast corner Denny Way and 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue (1940-1954). It was a diner and drive-in restaurant with a twin-domed design and large ice-blue neon sign proclaiming the name of the establishment.

Up until late July 2001, the Twin Teepees Restaurant stood at 7201 Aurora Avenue North (Old Highway 99) in Seattle's Green Lake neighborhood. This icon of the recent past was integrated into the cultural and urban landscape along Old Highway 99. Constructed in 1936-37, The "Twin T-P's" was designed by architect Dell W. Harris for Herman Olson who patented the double teepee design in 1937. Its owner demolished it after it had been closed after a fire, which caused damage to the interior.

Hat 'n' Boots is significant as an excellent example of programmatic architecture in Seattle, the state of Washington, and the United States. It is the sole surviving example of a programmatic building in Seattle. It is also unique because while there was more than one milk bottle or wigwam, there were no other known cowboy hat and boots.

### The Gas Station

The gas station in America has evolved from selling gas from pumps at the curbside to various types of drive-in filling and service stations. This evolution was inspired by factors such as the growth of car production, the breakup of the Standard Oil Trust in 1911, and the movement toward building better roads. Different stations were first built in America between 1907 and 1913. Standard Oil of California opened a station in Seattle in 1907. Shell Oil established the American Gasoline Company of Seattle in 1912. It was the first company to sell gasoline and motor oil exclusively. (Jakle, 1994)

The National Petroleum News identified nine gas station types from 1910 through 1990. They are identified as curbside, shed, house, house with canopy, house with bays, oblong box, small box, small box with canopy, and canopy with booth. In an attempt to be more compatible with the surrounding neighborhoods and landscape, gas station design ranged from Classical Revival temples, English cottages, Colonial Revival houses, to prefabricated steel and glass boxes, among others. "Corporate stations of the 1910s and 1920s took the first steps toward developing a unified visual approach toward marketing. Authorized dealers were also required to use company colors, logos, signage, and in some instances, station house design. Independent stations, not to be outdone, frequently chose more theatrical mimetic, fantasy, or Art Deco architectural motifs and more aggressive signage. For all stations of the period, domestic styles were particularly favored, often with distinctly regional overtones." (Lentz, 1995)

Hat 'n' Boots did not necessarily fit into one of the nine types of gas station forms. However, in order to compete with the corporate-owned gas stations, the original owner (Buford Seals) created a mimetic form of product placement and signage to get attention. Larger-than-life objects draw the attention of motorists. The Hat 'n' Boots, though no longer a gas station, continues to draw the attention of people.

## Conclusion

The significance of Hat 'n' Boots lies in the nature of its name, sheer size, design, and structural integrity. It serves as a local, state and national icon of vernacular roadside architecture and as a huge identifier of the unique neighborhood of Georgetown.

There was a significant period of time when the fate of Hat 'n' Boots was unknown. Structures such as the Hat 'n' Boots have been seen as disposable when land use considerations give way to development. Known as oddities of the landscape or kitsch and not built to last, they have been discarded without thought to their contribution to the cultural and architectural heritage of the communities in which they reside. As the sole surviving example and an excellent example of programmatic architecture in Seattle, the nomination and designation of Hat 'n' Boots as a City of Seattle landmark will ensure its place in history.

***The features of the Landmark to be preserved, include:*** The exteriors of both structures and their dimensional and locational relationship to each other.

Issued: July 17, 2002



Karen Gordon  
City Historic Preservation Officer

cc: La Dele Sines  
Ken Bounds, DOPAR  
Stephen Wright, DOPAR  
Rodney Rennie, DNR  
Allyson Brooks, OAHP  
Greg Griffith, OAHP  
Lorne McConachie, Chair, LPB  
Diane Sugimura, DCLU  
Cheryl Mosteller, DCLU  
Ken Mar, DCLU